

# PERCEPTION IN CLASSICAL INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: EXPLORING SENSUOUS AND NON-SENSUOUS KNOWLEDGE

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## Abstract

*“Though Philosophy is a system of thought, the experience it organises must be both rich and comprehensive. The vision of the philosopher is the reaction of his whole personality to the nature of the experience world. It is a mistake to think that the only qualifications for elucidating truth in the sphere of philosophy are purely intellectual. Only those whose lives are deep and rich light on the really vital syntheses significant for mankind.” (1)(S. Radhakrishnan, 1929).*

*So a right method of knowledge is required to sense the world in the right way. Western world takes the help of perception and inferences as methods and deals Epistemology and Metaphysics separately. Indian Philosophy uses Epistemology and Metaphysics interdependently. There are six distinct methods of knowledge as per Classical Indian Text, perception being one of them, considered as immediate cognition, is chosen for the study because it has been agreed by all i.e. Western world and all the Indian School of Philosophy, with some differences i.e. sensuous only or sensuous and non-sensuous both. This research paper delves into the concept of Perception and its mechanism as per the Classical Indian Texts to understand the need of non-sensuous perception which makes the Indian Philosophy unique.*

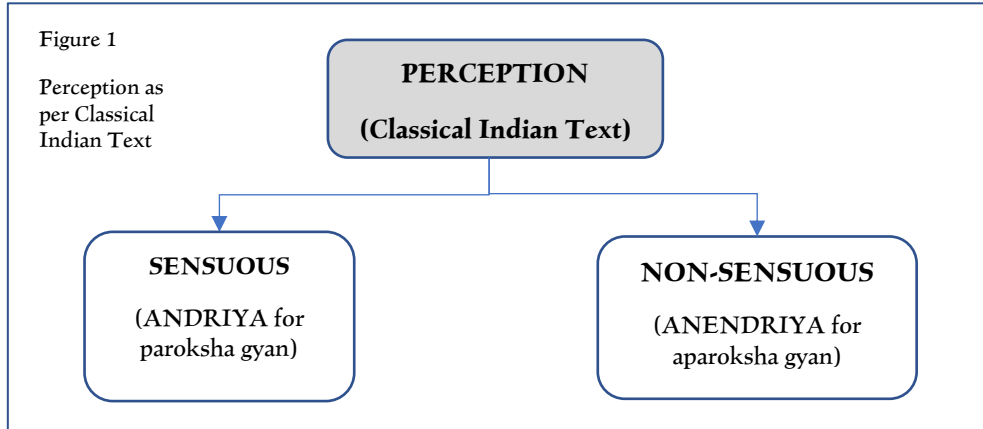
**Keywords:** Perception, Epistemology, Sankhya, Nayayiks, Vedantis, Yogdarshan, Gita, Pratyaksha, Upaman, Arthapatti, Anuplabdhi

## INTRODUCTION

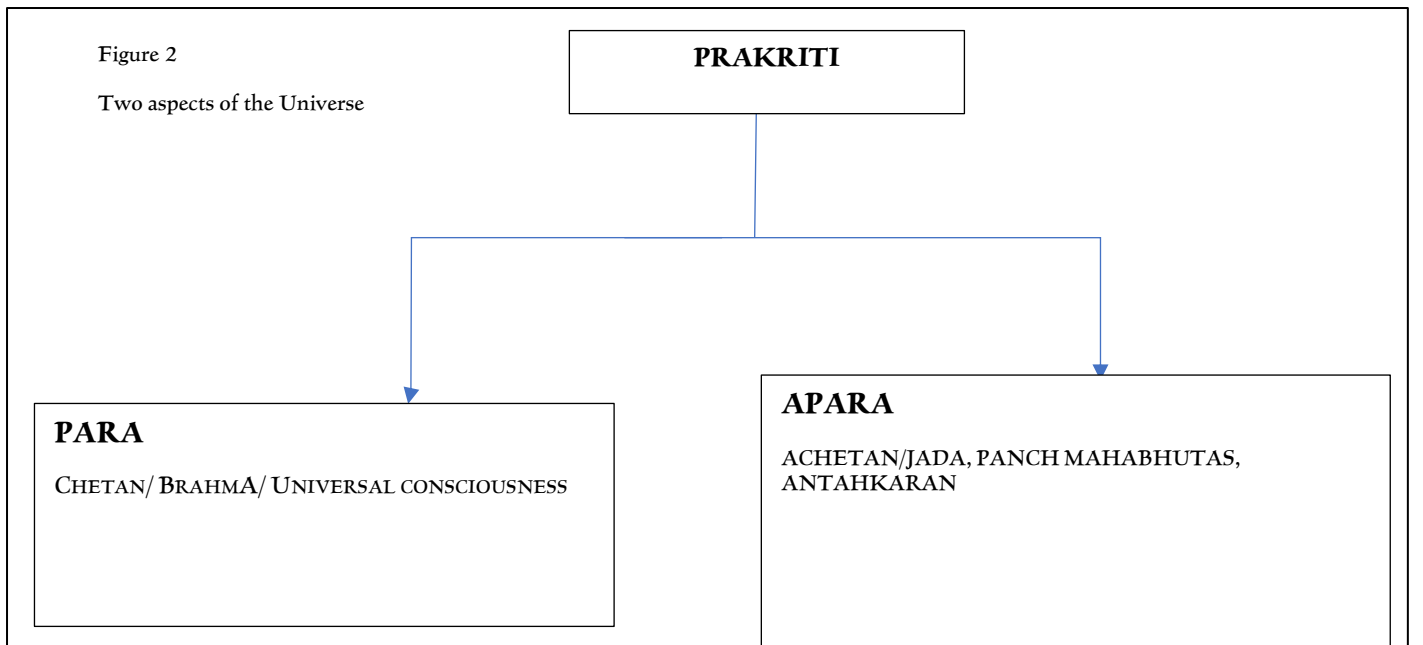
“Western philosophy generally recognizes two sources of knowledge -Perception and Inference. But Indian Philosophy presents a variety of opinion on this matter. The Charvaks admit only one source of valid knowledge-perception. The Bauddhas and some Vaisheshiks admit two sources- perception and inference. To these Sankhyas add a third-authority or testimony (sabda). The Naiyayikas admit a fourth way of knowing-comparison (Upamana) –in addition to these three. The Prabhakaras again add to these four methods a fifth- postulation or assumption (arthapatti). The Bhattas and the monistic Vedantins recognize, however, six methods of knowledge, adding non cognition (anuplabdhi) to the five already mentioned” (2) (D M Datta, 1960, page 19). Perception as information gained through sensory organs is agreed upon both by Modern Science and Indian School of Philosophy. The Indian system except Charvak, adds another dimension to it i.e. non-sensuous perception.

## CONCEPT OF PERCEPTION

The word in Sanskrit language for perception is ‘pratyaksha’ which means prati (to, before, near) + aksha (sense organ) = present to or before the sense organ (3). Perception, the immediate knowledge as explained further, is Paroksha and Aparoksha. The results are dependent on intellectual abilities. ‘All (what can be sensed) this is Brahman’ is ‘Paroksha Gyan’. ‘I am Brahman’ is Aparoksha Gyan. Indian Philosophy sought answers not only from sensuous perception ‘Paroksha Gyan’ but also through internalization and realization of Universal Consciousness which is non-sensuous perception ‘Aparoksha Gyan’. (4) Thus uses the Epistemology for Metaphysics for the ultimate objective of human life i.e. Self-Realization.



**According to Srimad Bhagwad Gita: (5,6,7)**(Baal Gangadhar Tilak, Gita Rahasya, Sri Aurbindo, Essays on Gita, Srimad bhagwad Gita, Gita Press, Gorakhpur) The writers in the commentaries on the Chapter 7 of Srimad Bhagwad Gita have put a detailed account of ‘The Nature & Universal Consciousness’ which throws light on the need of the concept of ‘Praoksha’ and ‘Aproksha’ knowledge and the need of perception to realize Universal Consciousness.

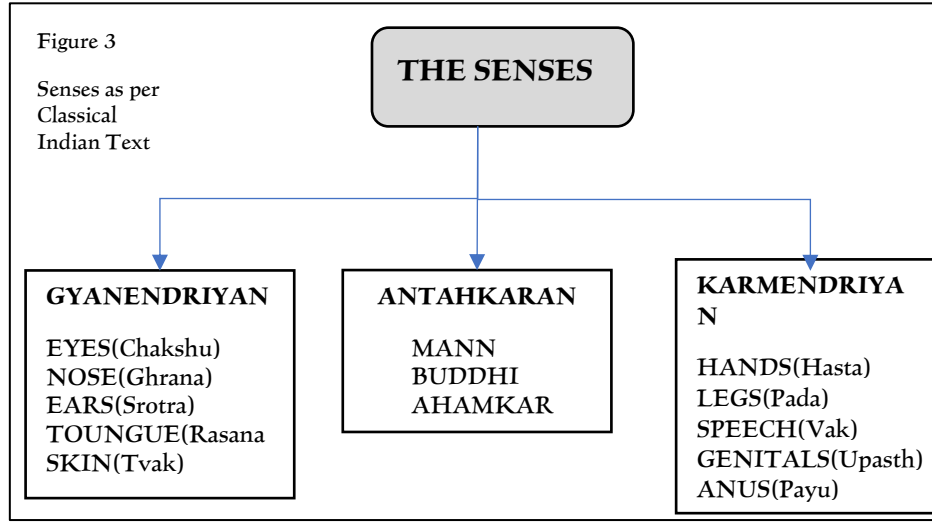


Universe has two aspects, ‘Para’ and ‘Apara’.

“भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च |  
अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा || 7.4||

bhūmir-āpo ’nalo vāyuh kham mano buddhir eva chaahankāra itiyam me bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā

‘Apara’ is ‘Achetan’ which has eight parts to it: Earth, Air, Water ‘Agni’, ‘Aakash’, ‘Mann’, ‘Buddhi’ & ‘Ahamkar’. The name comes from the Sanskrit apara, meaning “lower,” and prakriti, meaning “nature” or “source.” Prakriti is the primal matter or creative energy. Apara prakriti is the external world, ‘Jada’, the lower self, can be understood through the five senses, Mann, Budhdhi, and Ahamkar. The five senses are: Sight-Chakshu, Hearing-Srotra, Touch-Tvak, Smell-Ghrana, Taste-Rasana).



अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् |  
जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् || 7.5 ||

apareyam itas tvanyām prakṛtiṁ viddhi me parām  
jīva-bhūtām mahā-bāho yayedam dhāryate jagat”

Its opposite is Para prakriti, which is the inner or spiritual world. It is the life-element by which the whole universe is upheld. Para Prakriti is ‘Chetan’, higher self, cannot be understood through ‘Gyanendriyas’ (the five senses).

The ‘Para’ and ‘Apara prakriti’ both are governed by a single entity which is the Universal Consciousness, the Lord Himself (Verse 9.8). Krishna, further states in verse 10.42 anything in this Universe is Me i.e. The Universal Consciousness.

Great Seers, mystics and rishis in Upanishads, and various classical texts like Smāhitās, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Vivekachudamāni, Bhagwad Gītā, have emphasized that in order to realise the Universal Consciousness which is the ultimate goal of the human being, one has to go beyond the sensuous perception i.e. through internalization.

## PERCEPTION ACCORDING TO OTHER INDIAN TEXTS

To understand ‘Perception or Pratyaksha’, it is best to understand with Nyāya School of Philosophy. All the other School of Philosophy agrees to it with some differences.

### 1. According to Nyāya sūtras (8)(9):

“इन्द्रियार्थसन्निकवोत्पन्नम् ज्ञानमव्यपदेश्यमभिजाति व्यवसायात्मकम् – प्रत्यक्षम् (1.1.4).

indriyārthasannikavotpannam jñānamavyapadesyam

Sannikarsh The Naiyāyikas define perception as a true, unerring and certain cognition obtained from sense-object contact (sannikarsh). As a source of knowledge, the classification of perception can be made on different grounds as follows:

Based on how our senses connect with the objects: There are two kinds of perception:

**Laukika pratyaksha (ordinary perception):** When there is ordinary contact of the sense with the object presented to the sense, then the perception is called laukika pratyaksha. There are six different kinds of laukika pratyaksha: • Cāksusa (visual) • Sparsana (tactual) • Srautra (auditory) • ghrānaja (olfactory) • Rasanā (gustatory) • Mānasa (mental or internal).

Based on the nature of senses, there are two different kinds of perception:

**Bahya (external perception):** Bahya is produced by our external senses of touch, taste, smell, vision and hearing.

**Manasa (internal perception):** Manasa is produced by the mind’s connection with the psychical states or conditions. Manasa is the only internal sense organ which has the capacity to perceive various qualities of the soul, such as sukha (pleasure), dukha (pain), iccha (desire), dvesa (aversion), prayatna (willingness), sanjñāna (cognition).

**Alaukika pratyaksha (extraordinary perception):** Knowledge

It is, again, believed to be of three different kinds as follows:

1. **Samanyalakshana:** The direct perception of the universal class is the medium through which we perceive all the particular members of that class.
2. **Gyanalaksana:** The direct perception of the quality brought about by the sense-organ not ordinarily capable of perceiving it and not present at the moment is called gyanalaksana.
3. **Yogaja:** The intuitive perception of all the objects, no matter how small or hidden, at all the times- past or future. Those who generate such a capability in mind by committed meditation (yogabhyasa) is called yogaja or the intuitive perception. Such extraordinary perception is spontaneous, consistent and available only to those who attain spiritual perfection (yukta).

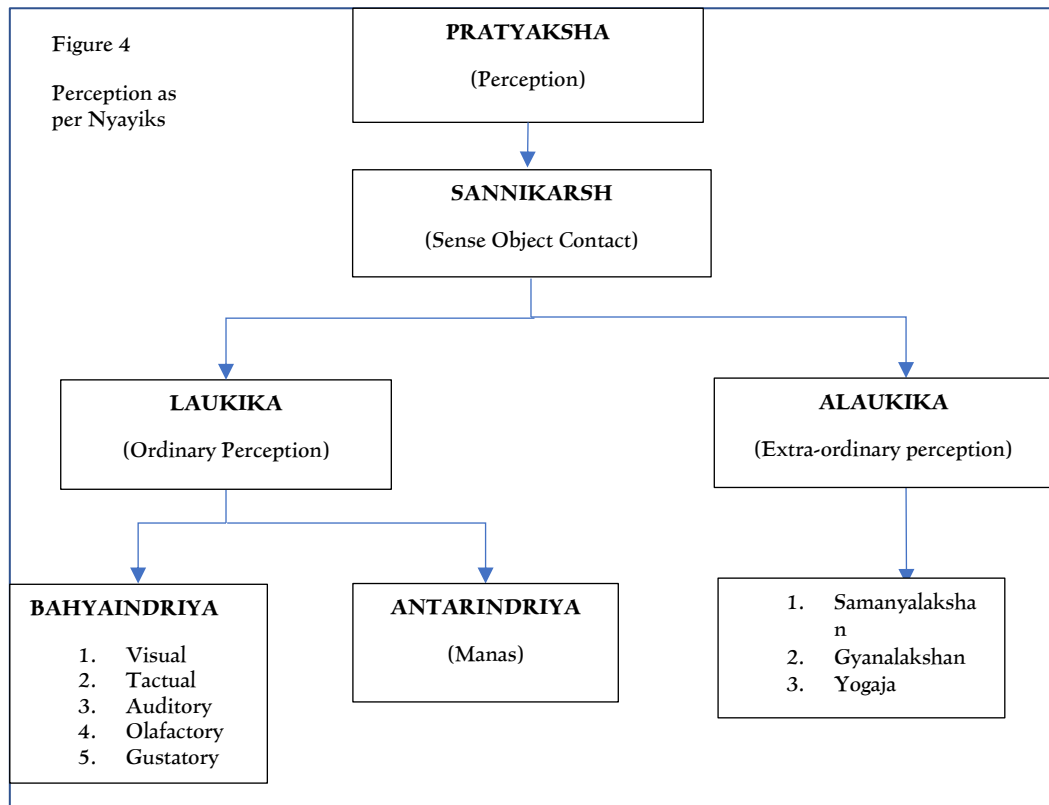
2. **According to Pratyakshakhand of Tattvachintamani by Gangesa Upadhyaya (15)**

साक्षात्प्रतितिः प्रत्यक्षम्  
sākṣātpṛatitīḥ pratyakṣam

Perception is immediate cognition and is the primary source of knowledge. This view is accepted by Prabhākara School of mīmāṃsa. L.T. Hobhouse in his book “The theory of knowledge” (10) says that, “Immediacy of cognition, and not sense operation, is the intrinsic characteristic of perceptual knowledge” which supports the above point of view.

ज्ञानाकारणकम् ज्ञानम् य प्रत्यक्षम्  
Jñānākāraṇakam jñānam (pratyakṣam)

Perceptual cognition is the knowledge to which no other knowledge is instrumental. Gangeṣa upādhyāya, founder of Neo Nyāya School, accepted this school of thought.



3. **Sāikhya (16) and Yoga systems (12):** Accept three pramānas namely perception, inference and authentic word (āptavacanam).

दृष्टमनुमानमाप्तवचनं च सर्वप्रमाणसिद्धत्वात् । त्रिविधं प्रमाणमिष्टं प्रमेयसिद्धिः प्रमाणाद्धि ॥ 4 ॥ (Sankhyakarika, verse 4)

dr̥ṣṭam-anumānam-āpta-vacanam ca sarva-pramāṇa-siddhatvāt | tri-vidham pramāṇam-iṣṭam prameya-siddhiḥ pramāṇāt-hi ||

“The means to right perception involves direct observation, inference and authentic authority.”

प्रत्यक्षानुमानागमाः प्रमाणानि ॥1.7॥ (Patanjali Yogsutra)

Here authentic word particularly means Vedic testimony, which conveys the knowledge of facts beyond the range of perception and inference.

#### 4. Few other opinions of Indian Philosophers:

**Cārvākas-** Sense perception is the only valid knowledge. Very similar to the old materialistic western view.

**Vaiṣeṇikas:-** Accepts perception and inference. It includes verbal testimony and the rest in others. (Vaiṣeṇika Sūtras IX: 2.3)

**Non-Vedic Buddhists and Jains:-** Accept only perception and inference.

**Prabhākara School of Pūrva-mémāṃsa:-** Accepts perception, inference, verbal testimony, comparison and postulation.

**Kumarila School of:-** Accepts all six methods of knowledge.

#### MECHANISM

The mechanism of perception is best explained by Yogsutra of Maharishi Patanjali which is in accordance with all.

1. Player in the process of perception as per Indian Philosophy is the Power of Mind (Antahkaran) which includes Mann (Memory Bank & The Processing Unit), Buddhi (Intellect), Chitta (Transparent medium over Cosmic Intelligence) and Ahamkar (Sense of Identity).
2. Chitta is a Sanskrit word meaning "consciousness" and is derived from the root word, chit, meaning "to perceive." It is all that is perceived and all that can be perceived. Consciousness is the space that holds all perceivable things. Chitta, as defined by Swami Vivekananda, is the tool through which the external world is perceived. It gets the strength from 'Atma/Chitishakti/Cosmic intelligence'.
3. Individual Consciousness which is also known as 'Chetna', can be accessed through the Chitta. Chitta is the medium between the External world and Internal world. Chitta is like a transparent glass to 'Chetna' through which it sees the world outside and identifies itself accordingly which is 'Ahamkar'.
4. Ahamkar is our identity, the boundaries out of our finite knowledge of this infinite world. To be able to know the infinite world, boundaries of the finite world needs to be erased first.
5. On the surface of this transparent medium (Chitta), memories of the past knowledge (perception and response) keeps depositing in the form of 'Samskaras'. Perception in the present evokes the past memories (the knowledge and the responses). And is the resultant of past memories and present information. Thus there is an unending and ongoing play of 'Samskaras' and 'Vrittis' in cyclic pattern on the Chitta which influences the perception. Vrittis are the cyclic pattern of thoughts.
6. To be able to perceive clearly and correctly, 'Chitta', the transparent needs to be cleared with the dust of Vrittis and deposits of Samskaras.

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥1.2॥

“Yogas Chitta Vritti Nirodha” (Patanjali Yogsutra 1.2) (12)

7. When the four lobed Antahkaran is cleared with Samskaras, Vrittis, & Ahamkar what remains inside is, only the pure and calm mind. Which when focused on any subject, gives the anubhūṭ gyan, complete knowledge of the subject.
8. The Cosmic knowledge which is the inherent property of each human being has the knowledge of the entire Universe as the name suggests. It is like a telescope/microscope which when aimed, tuned and focused on any object, gives the complete knowledge of the object. This is non-sensuous perception. Maharshi Patanjali gives the analogy of a transparent and clear crystal which is when put over anything, provides knowledge of the subject without deflections or distortions which is true for External and Internal Perception both.

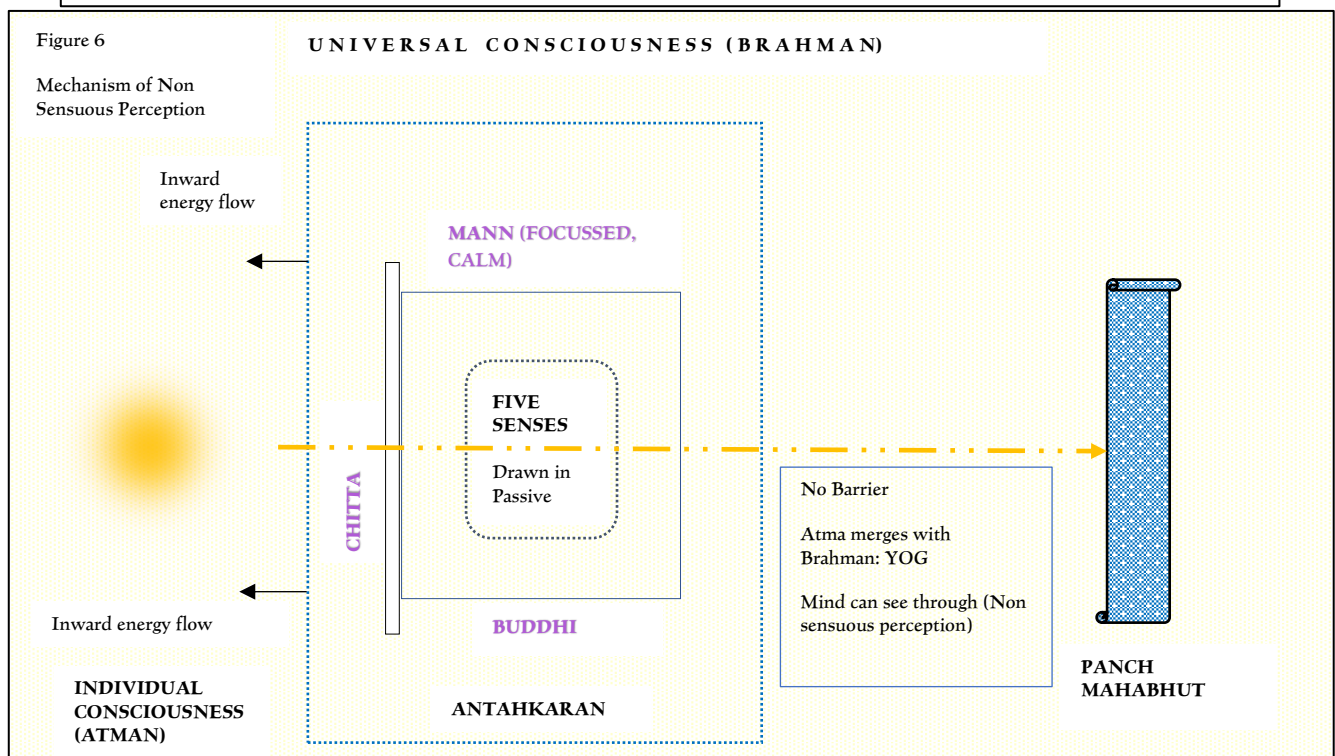
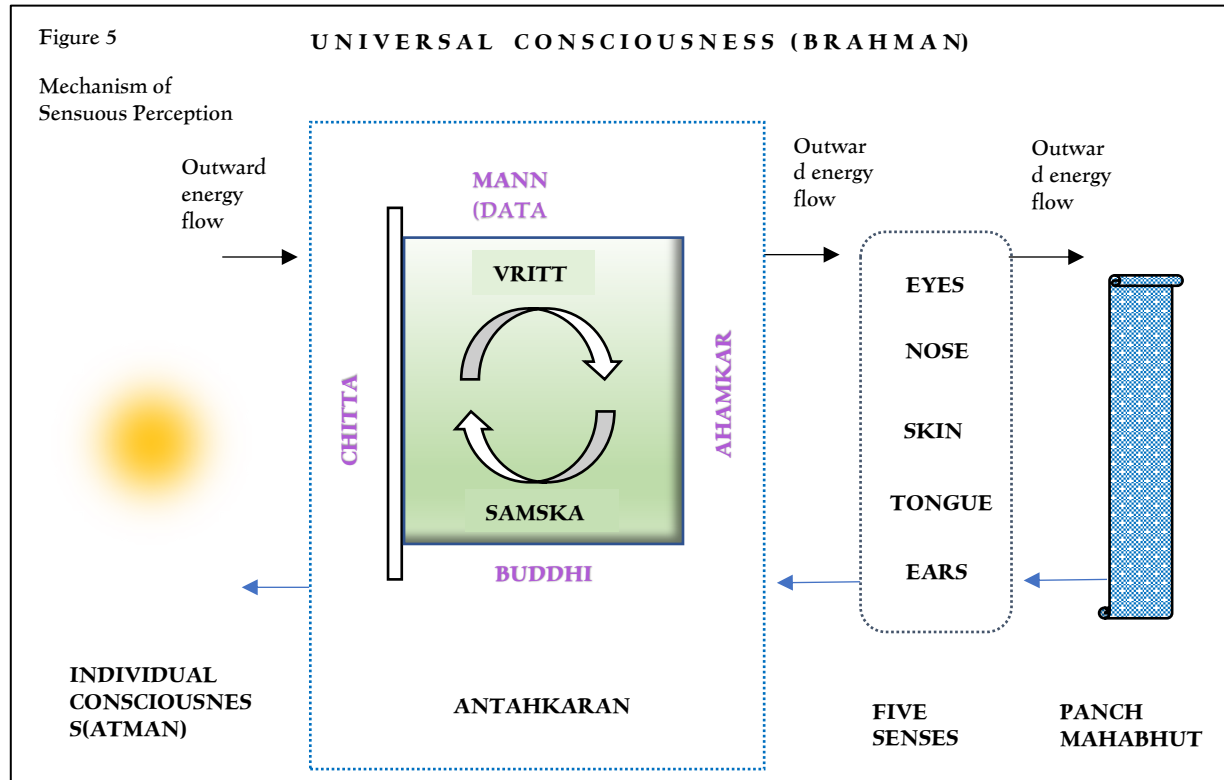
“Paramanu-Paramamahattva-Antah-Asya- Vasikarah” (Patanjali Yogsutra 1.40) (12)

When The Mind Develops The Power Of Stabilizing On The Smallest Size As Well As On The Greatest One, Then The Mind Comes Under Control.

क्षीणवृत्तेरभिजातस्येव मणेरग्रहीतुग्रहणग्राह्येषु तत्स्थितदज्जनतासमापत्तिः॥1.41॥

**“Ksinavrtteh-abhijatasya-iva-maneh-grahitr-grahana-grahyesu-tatstha-tadanjanata-samapattih” (Patanjali Yog sutra 1.41) (12)**

(The Citta) After The Modifications Cease, Becomes Like A Transparent Crystal, With The Power Of Appearing In The Shape Of The Object Presented To It The Knowable, The Knower, Or The Act Of Knowing, (The Being) Called Samapatti Or Samadhi (In Yoga).





## DISCUSSION

The study collects facts from Srimad Bhagwad Gita and commentaries on texts of the Six Schools of Philosophy by different renowned scholars in order to understand the concept of Perception and its mechanism so that the **need of non-sensuous perception** is understood. Study supports the hypothesis, “non-sensuous perception is needed for the actual knowledge, yatharth gyan, realization of self”.

Sensory perception though it is the direct outcome of the contact between object and senses, could be ambiguous. For example, mirage gives illusion of the water. By looking at the water, we can get the knowledge of its being water but its finer properties cannot be understood by merely looking at it. Nyaya Sutra, ‘sannikarsh’ (contact) is not only between object and senses, it is also the sannikarsh between senses and mind and sannikarsh of mind with soul. One can have true knowledge only after all the three contacts.

Senses being limited in their range can give the limited knowledge. The non-sensuous perception is required for the real knowledge/yatharth gyan/anubhut gyan. Various texts support this concept. Lord Krishna in Bhagwad Gita explains it through ‘Apara and Para’, Nyayiks and Neo Nyayiks through ‘Laukik and Alaukik’ perception. Vaisheshiks supports the theory. Sankhya in verse 10-11(16) of Sankhyakarika terms it as ‘Vyakt and Avyakt’. Sankhya for non-sensuous perception,

सौक्ष्म्यातदनुपलब्धिर्नाभावात् कार्यतस्तदुपलब्धिः । महदादि तच्च कार्यं प्रकृतिविरूपं सरूपं च ॥ ८ ॥ (16)

saukṣmyāt-tat-anupalabdhiḥ nā-abhāvāt kāryataḥ tat-upalabdheḥ | mahat-ādi tat-ca kāryaṁ prakṛtisārūpaṁ virūpaṁ ca  
||

“Non-perception of Nature is because of subtlety, not because of non-existence, since Nature is perceived through its effects. These effects are intelligence and the rest. Some are similar to Nature and some dissimilar.”

Sankhya and Yogsutra elaborates the mechanism. In Yogsutra, Mararshi Patanjali explains the process of internalization in Rajyoga in four steps:

1. Withdrawl from senses, the outer world, ‘Pratyahar’
2. Internalize i.e. focus inwardly, ‘Dharna’
3. Meditate’ go deeper, ‘Dhyān’
4. Realize ‘Samadhi’

Yoga, methodology of internalization (getting into the non-sensuous perception) is the unison of the soul with either known or unknown and the path towards true knowledge.

Except Charvak School of Philosophy, all agrees that perception has two parts sensuous and non-sensuous. Charvak is materialistic school of thoughts which believed in pleasure. It differed completely from the rest of the Indian Schools of Philosophy. Need for the concept of non-sensuous perception emerged from the ultimate goal of human life being the ‘moksh’, self-realization and Charvaks believed only on pleasure.

The study finds out the need for the concept of non-sensuous perception according to Classical Indian Texts is,

1. To get knowledge of creation

सृष्टिर्नाम ब्रह्मरूपे सच्चिदानन्दवस्तुनि  
अब्धौ फेनादिवत् सर्वनामरूपप्रसारणा  
दृग्-दृश्य-विवेक धी.

srñtirnāma brahmarūpe saccidānandavastuni  
abdhau phenādivat sarvanāmarūpaprasāraṇā  
(dāg-dāçya-viveka – 14) (13).

The manifesting of all names and forms in the entity which is existence-consciousness-bliss and which is the same as Brahman, like the foams etc. in the ocean, is known as creation.

2. To get knowledge of Brahman

स्ववाय्वग्निजलोर्वोसु देवतिर्यग्निरादिसु  
अभिन्नास्सच्चिदानन्दाः भिद्यते रूपनामनी  
दृग्-दृश्य-विवेक धी

khaväyvagnijalorvosu devatiryagnirädisu  
abhinnässaccidānandāu bhidyate rūpanāmané II  
(dāg-dāçya-viveka – 21) (13).

The attributes of existence, consciousness and bliss are equally present in the ākāça (ether), air, fire, water, and earth as well as in gods, animals and men, etc. Name and forms make the differ from other.  
It helps to navigate through life in calm and peaceful manner and merge with inner consciousness to the supreme consciousness. The ultimate goal of human being is 'Moksha'. The culmination point of 'Yogsutra' states it as:

पुरुषार्थशून्यानां गुणानां प्रतिप्रसवः केवल्यं स्वरूपप्रतिष्ठा वा चितिशक्तिरिति ॥ 4.35॥ (12)

**The return of the qualities devoid of the purpose or goal of this life, to get absorbed in its own cause, is Kaivalya Mukti. Or the soul becoming situated in its real form is called salvation.**

## CONCLUSION

Knowledge is pure consciousness beyond the relativity of the knower and the known. It is prior to every form of existence. Western epistemology has paid scanty attention towards it. Based on respective approaches, Concept and Objective of Perception differs in Western world and in Classical Indian Texts. Indian philosophy sought the answers of Metaphysics through epistemology. For the purpose it has added the concept of non-sensuous perception which has been termed as 'Extra Sensory Perception' according to Modern science, part of pseudo-science because it lacks the scientific evidences and the methodology. This was the biggest limitation for the study. So a term, 'pseudo-science' was coined. There is a strong need for a fresh perspective to look at the problem. It is potentially a strong concept which should not be over looked.

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